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SUBJECT: PIPELINE EXPLOSION CUTS GAS TO GREECE

11. (U) Summary: A strong explosion disrupted a section of the pipeline used for transiting Russian natural gas to Greece on the morning of August 6. No one was injured in the blast. Officials quickly ruled out terrorism, blaming instead a landslide caused by recent heavy rains. Bulgargaz officials state gas supplies to Greece should resume in two to three days. End Summary.

12. (U) The explosion took place in a mountainous region two kilometers from the village of Dolno Bulgarchevo near Blagoevgrad, 80 kilometers from the Bulgarian border with Greece. Bulgargaz officials and Chief of the Blagoevgrad Regional Police Directorate Konstantin Tityanov immediately ruled out terrorism as the source of the blast. The Executive Director of Bulgartransgaz, Bulgargaz's infrastructure construction and repair arm, Angel Semerdjiev, announced the explosion was most probably caused by a soil shift, as a result of the recent heavy rains.

13. (SBU) Dimitar Gogov, Executive Director at Bulgargaz, told us that he preferred to term Monday's event "an accident", rather than "an explosion." Gogov said that a 10-12 meter section of the pipeline was destroyed, and repair work was underway. He predicted that gas deliveries to Greece, which amounted to 2.9 billion cubic meters in 2006, would resume in two to three days. Gogov said that while the exact reason for the explosion was not yet clear, he dismissed speculation that the accident was rooted in obsolete infrastructure. He noted that this piece of pipe was put in place in 1995. He said he thought results of a technical investigation into the accident would be available in about two weeks.

KARAGIANNIS